

The image of god

Literature



The image of God which in Latin is referred to as Imago Dei, is the real image, concept and theological doctrine in Christianity, Judaism and also Sufi Islam, which asserts that human beings are created in God's image and therefore inherent value independent of their utility or function.

Some posit that the imago dei describes people's similarity to God. ("image of God"): A theological term, applied uniquely to humans, which denotes the symbolical relation between God and humanity. The term has its roots in Genesis 1: 27, wherein " God created man in his own image. . ." This scriptural passage does not mean that God is in human form, but rather, that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual nature.

Thus, humans mirror God's divinity in their ability to actualize the unique qualities with which they have been endowed, and which make them different than all other creatures: rational structure , complete centeredness, creative freedom, a possibility for self-actualization, and the ability for self-transcendence.

Most proponents of this view focus on physical similarities people have with God, while others expand the definition to incorporate non-physical components. People's similarity with God, it is argued, is passed down from Adam. Others suggest the imago dei describes people as God's counterpart in the universe. This view focuses on humans as the relational partner for God.

The relationship operates to some degree in the manner that humans relate to one another - by conversation. Proponents emphasize that God primarily

created people for fellowship. The third definition of the imago dei is that it describes people's dominion over the earth. In this view, the application of the imago dei is the focus.

Ruling over creation is the essence of the imago dei to some who subscribe to this definition. More common, however, is the notion that having imago dei qualifies people to rule. Therefore, all proponents advocate that the imago dei refers to the human's status as created beings.

The fourth definition of the imago dei is that the term describes people as God's representatives on earth. This view does not focus as much on God's relationship to people, as it does people's relationship to others. Advocates emphasize the transcendence of God over people, thus making a special need for His continued presence on the earth. God meets this need through giving people the imago dei. Four theologians have been especially significant in contributing to the doctrine of the imago dei - Irenaeus, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Karl Barth. Irenaeus

Irenaeus lived in the second century after Christ. The primary post he held was the Bishop of Lyons. In AD 185 he wrote a book called *Against Heresies*, where he wrote in opposition to Gnosticism. It is in this refutation that his beliefs on the imago dei are found.

Irenaeus' premise was to make a distinction between the words *selem* and *demut* in Genesis 1: 26-27. It was his contention that due to the fall of mankind, people lost the likeness of God, but retained the image. To Irenaeus, "image" in Genesis 1: 26 meant people are rationale and free

beings. Because people have retained these attributes, even though sin is in the world; thus, the “ image” must have been unaffected by the fall.

Therefore, what is being restored in people through Christ is their likeness to God, since their image was never lost. Irenaeus’ assertion of the restoration of people’s likeness to God is largely Christocentric. Because Christ was God in the flesh, he showed people how the unmarred likeness of God resides in a person. Moreover, since Christ is the likeness of God, in becoming more like him, people progress in being restored. Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas held that the *imago dei* exists in a person’s intellect or reason. Intellect, in his assertion, is a person’s most God-like quality. Because less rationale creatures, like animals, were not created with a mind that has the abilities of a human’s, they do not have the image of God. On the other hand, Aquinas teaches that the minds of angels are better than humans, so they have the image of God more so than people. According to Aquinas, before The Fall there was a struggle between reason and the “ lower powers” within people.

The “ lower powers” means the physical temptations, such as lust and gluttony, which overwhelmed a person’s ability to reason. People were not able to control their urges through reasoning that those sins would have a negative affect and gave in to them. People did not fall immediately after being created because they had a supernatural grace that enabled them to control themselves.

When The Fall occurred, people lost the supernatural grace with which they were created. After The Fall, people lost all control of their “ lower powers.”

This idea is reflected in Psalm 81: 12, " So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices" (NAU), and Romans 1: 24 " Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them" (NAU).

Aquinas articulates his idea this way: In his original state man was divinely endowed with the grace and privilege that, so long as his mind was subject to God, the lower powers of the soul would be subject to his rationale mind, and his body to his soul. Man's mind by sin abandoned subordination to God, with the consequence that now his lower powers were no longer wholly responsive to his reason; and such was the rebellion of the flesh against reason that the body as well was no more wholly responsive to soul.

Aquinas wrote that the *imago dei* existed in people in three different stages. Stage one includes all people, whether they are Christian, Jew, or Muslim, whether an atheist or a theist. All people have the ability to rationalize that there is an understanding and loving God. For example, people can know through reason that there is an Ultimate Cause of all things. Aquinas calls it the " Unmoved Mover." Stage two consists of people who are just. This stage is made up of people who know and love God. However, people's knowledge and love of God is imperfect.

Their affections toward God are real and genuine, but because of their limitations due to sin, they are unable to do so perfectly. Stage three consists of those people who know and love God perfectly. Aquinas calls these people " blessed." He does not hold that this perfection is attained only when life is over, but it is possible to enter this third stage while living on earth. Whereas stage-two people have the image of God by the conformity

of grace, stage three people have it by having a likeness of God's glory. Aquinas holds that it is necessary for people to enter stage two for two reasons.

One, people need to be healed from the damage The Fall did to them. Entering stage two would restore their intellect. Two, people need to enter stage two to "achieve the meritorious good of supernatural virtue." In stage one, people have a knowledge about God, but not knowledge of God. Moreover, stage one does not enable salvation for people. John Calvin

John Calvin gave more attention to the doctrine of *imago dei* than any theologian since Augustine. Familiar with the African bishop, Calvin advanced Augustine's metaphor of likening the image of God in people to a mirror. That is, people in some way reflect God as a mirror reflects images.

Contrary to Irenaeus and medieval theologians, Calvin did not distinguish between the Hebrew words *selem* and *demut*. Like other Protestant Reformers, he rejected the contention that there is a difference between "image" and "likeness." To Calvin, Genesis 1: 26-27 reflects poetic parallelism, which is common in Hebrew literature. He sees a hendiadys, which is when two words are used to communicate one idea.

To Calvin, the image of God exists in the soul: "For although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul." While the soul is the central part of the image, Calvin asserts that no part of an individual is untouched by the *imago dei*. The Fall had a drastic affect on "image" and "likeness" according to Calvin. He suggests that before the fall Adam and Eve were perfectly intelligent,

righteous, and obedient, and that the image of God was clearly seen in them before they sinned. After The Fall, the image was frightfully marred.

Reason and will remained, although tainted; but the mirror was essentially shattered. Calvin concedes the *imago dei* in people was not reduced to non-existence. Rather than being completely erased from all existence, it is like an object that has been badly burned - it does not cease to exist, but it lies in the form of ash and dust, unrecognizable and bearing no resemblance of its former self. Karl Barth